



Support Woomera Protestors

238 asylum seekers imprisoned at Woomera 'detention centre' in the South Australian desert have been protesting against delays in determination procedures and violations of their rights since Wednesday. Of these, 186 are on hunger strike and 70 have sewn their lips together in utter desperation. There are 1,000 asylum seekers, including many children, imprisoned at Woomera. Some have been living in this appalling prison for up to five years.

One of the main reasons for the never-ending protests and desperation is the Australian

government's inhuman policy of mandatory detention of asylum seekers. This particular protest is also related to the fact that the Australian government has imposed a freeze on processing applications of Afghans since the collapse of the Taliban. The Immigration Minister Ruddock says the recent change of government means that Afghans can no longer be regarded as 'genuine refugees.' In reality, however, Afghans have never been regarded as genuine refugees. They have been imprisoned, mistreated, refused and criminalised prior

to the collapse of the Taliban. In contravention to international refugee law, they have been denied entry and forcibly rerouted to the island of Nauru under the so-called Pacific Solution even before the 'change of government.'

The reality in Afghanistan and the enduring reasons for flight is not of interest to Ruddock, who says that 'those who are unhappy with their treatment in Australia should return home.' This is in fact the reason for the mandatory detention, the freeze, the Pacific Solution, the criminalization. With this policy of deterrence and cruel

and inhuman treatment, the Australian government expects to deter people or to physically and mentally crush those who have entered so that they will sew their lips, die on hunger strike, commit suicide, despair and return 'home'...

The International Federation of Iranian Refugees condemns the Australian government's anti-asylum policies and laws and calls on groups and individuals to intervene. Our intervention can and must end acts of despair and self-mutilation and raise a global banner of positive resistance against the Australian government.

Demonstration against Deportation in Sweden

Hundreds of people took part in an IFIR-Stockholm branch-organised demonstration at the Swedish Immigration Department in Stockholm on Friday, January 11. Demonstrators condemned the Swedish government's plan to deport Mahmood Asadpour and Faramarz Heshmatpasand, two Iranian asylum seekers,

and defended asylum rights. Rahim Yazdanparast, the IFIR Stockholm director, Siamak Bahari of the Worker-communist Party of Iran - Stockholm, Mahin Alipour, Spokesperson for the International Campaign in Defence of Women's Rights in Iran - Stockholm, Okoth Osewe from 'No-one is Illegal' among others, ad-



dressed the demonstration, exposed the anti-asylum policies of the Swedish government and called for an end

to deportations. An IFIR delegation then met with immigration officials to raise the

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Condemning Islam isn't Racist

Maryam Namazie



Ex-MP Jackie Ballard who recently moved to Iran states it is racist to be anti-Islam and says it is 'time "liberal" opinion started to try to understand Islam better and to learn something about the culture of the Middle East...' (January 7 article in The Guardian entitled 'Another kind of freedom'). She further asserts that women in Iran have 'freedoms denied to many in the west', including that a friend can breastfeed in restaurants, that Iranian women 'keep their own names after marriage' and because she feels safer in Iran ['If women dress in a sexually provocative or attractive way, perhaps it is not surprising that men respond to them as sexual beings...'].

Ballard's pathetic examples of so-called freedoms overlook the real and bleak status of women living under Islamic laws. In Iran, veiling is compulsory for women in all public places; even children aged nine to 11 are forbidden from wearing 'flashy hues'. They are subject to harassment, imprisonment and fines if their dress or behaviour is deemed inappropriate. They are segregated in public places, including buses, schools and health care. Women can only work in an occupation that is not contrary to Islam; the law, for example, prohibits women from becoming judges since they are believed to be swayed by emotion rather than logic. Women are not allowed to travel without the permission of their husbands. In court, the number of witnesses required to prove a crime is higher if the witnesses are female. A woman's right to divorce and child custody are limited. The legal age for girls to 'marry' is 9. Any form of friendship or association between the sexes outside marriage is punishable by flogging, im-

prisonment, forced marriage and stoning to death... For Ballard, however, these are merely 'another kind of freedom'. For her, women living in Iran and Islam-stricken societies have different freedoms because of their place of birth and 'their' culture and religion. Ballard even goes so far as to credit Islam for the facts that 'women in Iran are in many ways among the most assertive and socially independent' or that 'more women take engineering degrees in Iran than in the UK' though these have nothing to do with Islam and everything to do with women's own resistance and transgressions.

Ballard says blaming religion for the denial of women's rights in countries like Iran 'disguised as concern for human rights' is tantamount to 'blaming Protestantism in Britain or Catholicism in Mexico for endemic domestic violence' and to seeing 'paedophilia as a symptom of a Christian or western culture'. This is nonsense. Islam is in political power in Iran and many countries of the Middle East and North

Africa and cannot be compared to Protestantism in Britain. The Bible is not the law of the land in Britain, while the Koran is in Iran; it is not in the constitution and penal code nor enforced in the courts and by morality police in Britain, while it is in Iran.

Nonetheless, according to Ballard, to condemn Islam is racist. Ballard conveniently ignores the distinction between anti-Islam sentiments and racism against Muslims. While racism is unacceptable, an attack on Islam and Islamic states and laws is not only permissible but a requisite given the indescribable violence and misogyny meted out by Islam in political power. Progressive norms and secularism are the results of enlightenment and just struggles against this very sort of reaction. Ballard's rebuke only attempts to silence those who speak out for civil rights by labelling them as racists. In fact, however, it is her culturally relativist assertions that are racist. By justifying and excusing women's status as cultural, she denies women and people living in the Middle East and Iran universal rights and freedoms.

Demonstration against Deportation in Sweden, from P. 1

following demands: an immediate end to deportations, a re-opening of closed cases and declaring Iran unsafe.

The IFIR-Stockholm Branch

continues to actively resist the deportation orders of Asadpour and Heshmatpasand and has called on public opinion to intervene.

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Support Iranian Asylum Seekers in Turkey

Iranian asylum seekers housed in Yozgat camp in Turkey have begun a sit-in protesting their mistreatment, lack of security and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees deficient determination procedures. Some of the protesters have been in the camp for over two years. According to information received from refugee representatives, the UNHCR had agreed to meet with them on December 26 to discuss their grievances. The UNHCR, however,

failed to make this meeting. In protest, refugees began a hunger strike on January 3, which ended with IFIR's intervention. The sit-in continued, however, since IFIR organises refugees around positive forms of resistance rather than those that mutilate or harm them.

IFIR fully supports the refugee demands and calls on groups and individuals to put pressure on the UNHCR to meet with and address their legitimate demands.

German Conference: Asylum after 11 September

The tenth annual conference of the IFIR - Germany will be held from 8-10 February 2002. The main theme of the conference will be the right to asylum after September 11. The first day of the conference will be conducted in German and English. Government representatives, the head of the parliamentary commission on asylum and representatives of political parties and organisations,

refugee agencies and pro refugee celebrities will participate in the opening day of the conference. The remaining two days will be conducted in Persian. For further information and details of how to attend the conference please contact: +49(0)1737334270, +49(0)1732743686, or send us an email at: pramazanali@yahoo.de, Ngaedi@aol.com.

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KDP must Free Hadi and Sheikhi

Mohiaddin Hadi and Salam Sheikhi, two Iranian asylum seekers, have been detained and imprisoned under inhumane conditions by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan, for the past several months. Hadi and Sheikhi are amongst thousands of Iranians forced to flee the Islamic regime of Iran. Many head towards the city of Soleimaniyeh to approach the UNHCR office in that city. This city has increasingly become unsafe for Iranians due to the collaboration between the ruling party in the region, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, and the Iranian regime. Fearing for their lives, Hadi and Sheikhi fled to Erbil, only

to be arrested by the ruling party in that city - the KDP.

The International Federation of Iranian Refugees condemns the arrests and demands that both be released immediately.

IFIR holds the KDP and the UNHCR responsible for their safety and well-being. We call on groups and individuals to send letters of protest to the KDP, Central Office: kdppress@aol.com, Fax: +87376160321; European Office: kdpeurope@t-online.de, Fax: +493079743746; UNHCR office in Iraqi Kurdistan: irqba@unhcr.ch; Geneva: hqpr00@unhcr.ch, Fax: +41227398643.



Release all Asylum Seekers
from Woomera Prison
Today

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